

INTERVIEW WITH CLAY HARDY
BY DEBBIE CORBETT MAY 18, 2002

MS. CORBETT: My name is Debbie Corbett. I am interviewing Clay Hardy. It is May 18, 2002. I am basically just going to let Mr. Hardy tell his story. Unfortunately, we are in the lobby of the Convention Center and this may not be as quiet as it ought to be. And there may be some background disturbance.

MR. HARDY: My name is Clayton Hardy, and I am the son of Frank and Lillian Hardy. I was born in Concord, Massachusetts on June 3, 1931. My parents, at the time were residents of Brewer, Maine. My mother went down, back to her home, to have me. I was raised in Orrington, Maine. I attended grammar school there and graduated from Brewer High School in 1948. I just kind of knocked around for a while, and was federalized with the Air National Guard in February of 1951. I served until October of 1952. I was discharged and that afforded me the GI Bill. I had worked at a summer hotel for a number of years, and was exposed to other kids who had gone to college. I knew I didn't want to work in the mill all of my life. So, I applied to the University of Maine and was rejected because I had taken a social arts class in High School, so I had to go back Prep School, which I did. It was Higgins Classical Institute in Charleston, Maine. I graduated there in June of 1955. I entered the University of Maine in the fall and graduated in 1959. In the mean time, I got married during the summer before my senior year. I married Charlene Sprague from Oakfield.

I was influenced by a variety of people that were guests of the hotel [where he worked]. Not the least of which was Nelson Rockefeller, who when I was a bellhop there, sat down and talked to two of us and encouraged us to go on and get a college education. During my college career, I had to attend summer camp and I did that. I've got to back up a minute. The reason I went back to college was that on Mount Desert Island was Acadia National Park. And I thought that I would like to be a Park Ranger. A degree in Wildlife Management was required. So that's what I went after. That was one of the options to get in to the Park Service. In the spring, I went to Wildlife Camp. We visited Moosehorn Refuge, which was my first exposure to a refuge, that sort of put the Park Service on hold. Then, the summer I was a sophomore, I ran a Duck Banding Station for Dr. Malcolm Calder on the Penobscot River. That sold me on waterfowl. Later on, Mel and I went to the National Wildlife Convention in New York City where I met Radway, who was the Assistant Supervisor for Refuges in Region 5. That was where I started wanting to get into Refuges. It wasn't an easy task because of all of the things that were learned in Maine, how to take a Civil Service entrance exam wasn't one of them. I flunked the thing a couple of times. In fact, all of us but one, who took it [failed]. So that caused the University a little bit of concern and they got a bunch of us together and gave us hints on how to get in. So then, I took it and passed. I got on a register and never heard back from them. Then I started getting things from Social Security, and Vero Beach, Florida and Vicksburg, Mississippi in River Basins, which was going in those days, but

never anything from Boston. So I talked to the people in Boston. They said that I hadn't heard because I wasn't on the Register. I had gotten a job as an Instructor at the University of Maine Summer Camp following graduation. When that was over, I took a bus and went to Boston. This would have been in late August. I went to the Civil Service Commission and they advised me that I was on a Register in Washington, D. C. I asked to be transferred into the Boston area, which they did. It was probably some time in late September when I got notification that I had been selected to be Assistant Refuge Manager at Brigantine Refuge in Oceanville, New Jersey. We had a small apartment with very few items, and no money. My wife was working. She graduated from Nursing and in those days, she made \$158.00 a month as a Registered Nurse. I sold my guns to finance my trip. I left my wife who was pregnant with our daughter, and our son who had been born by then, to close up the house. I took the car and drove to Oceanville, New Jersey. Going down the Garden State Parkway the universal joints went bad on it. [The car]. By this time I was basically homesick enough to turn around and go home if the car would have gotten me there, but it didn't. So I went to Brigantine, and went to the Refuge. I introduced myself to Henry Whitley who was the Manager and got a room at Bester Blackman's Boarding House. I went to work and started looking for a place to live. The car wasn't running, so it had to be within walking distance of the Refuge, and there was only one of those opportunities in all of Oceanville. That was Mrs. Ray's house. She was a widow lady who had been assaulted in her home and was afraid to live alone there. So she had taken an apartment. So we rented the house for \$45.00 a month. The house was heated by two pot-bellied coal stoves. And there was a bucket-a-day hot water heater. It was the coldest winter on record in New Jersey that year. There is an interesting story that precedes that. The house was an unbelievable house. Her husband had decorated it and there were two living rooms. One of them had black wallpaper with big orange flowers on it. The middle room was green with orange flowers and a green ceiling. This, I brought my wife into. Harlan Perkins, who was the Maintenance man, was from Maine. I helped him a lot because my wife wasn't coming down until I had things squared away. He took me to Philadelphia to pick her up and brought her down there. We set up house keeping—without a car and in this grim house. It is just an amazing thing about 'Refuge Wives' that they accommodate these sorts of things. There is a very interesting story that goes here. Payday was on Friday, and Christmas was on Sunday. On Friday, the paychecks hadn't come in and I went to the Post Office on Saturday morning and they still hadn't come in. We had done no Christmas shopping. We had a box of macaroni and a pound of hotdogs in the house. But when I was coming back down from the Post Office, "Nuck" Wilson, who lived between us, and the Post Office, and was a Maintenance man on the Refuge, said, "Did the checks come in?" I told him, "No". He said, "Here, this will tide you over", and he handed me a twenty dollar bill. So, I took that home, and that brought some joy. That was followed shortly by "Perk's" wife stopping and wanting to know if we wanted to go in to Atlantic City shopping, which we did. Later on in the day a man by name of Lutzey Feldise, who as a turner pull operator in the Refuge who had just started working there, and I didn't really know him. I didn't really know any of those people. He came in and said that his family

had a turkey and duck farm and he handed me two, dressed Muskcovee [sic] ducks. Then, a little while later, "Perk" came by, Harlan Perkins, and he gave us about 14 pounds of pork because a couple of weeks before I had helped him. Along with others on the Refuge he raised hogs. When they did the butchering, I helped. So now we had an opportunity to get some Christmas presents and we had ducks, and pork. We went in and got stuff for the kids. Then on Christmas Day, Eric Baldwin came by. He was a classmate of mine. His parents lived in New Jersey. He was a graduate student out at the University of Utah, I think. The interesting this is; he was doing studies on the Refuge, way out in the desert if Utah and Lynn Greenwalt was the Refuge Manager. He came by with his girlfriend, and that was a very nice visit. The morning my very best friend and his wife, who were traveling between Vermont and West Virginia, stopped by with two bags of groceries. So it what turned out of be a grim Christmas with a pound of hot dogs and a box of macaroni turned into what Christmas was really all about!

MS. CORBETT: Yeah, you were Bob Cratchett there for a while!

MR. HARDY: And it's interesting; Henry Whitley, who was the Manager there, was not a wildlife person. He had gotten the job because he was a friend of Arthur Miller's, who was the Supervisor of Refuges. He had been Arthur's telegrapher, and clerk in a CC Camp down in the south sometime in the CCC days. "Whit" had a drinking problem. And he also had a problem with assistants being a threat to his position. So, I was given an assignment to do a biological survey on a proposed Refuge. I don't recall which one it was. It was up around Tuckahoe or over in the lower part of the state of New Jersey. I did these. This was along in the summer that I put these things together and was advised by the Manager that I couldn't have the clerk type it. So I had to type this thing, and the family was ready to go on vacation. I have to admit that it was not a good product. The facts were there, but it was somewhat sloppy. We came back from vacation and Mert Radway came down. After a while, Mert and Whit asked my to come with them. We went over to "Whit's" house, and I was advised that I was not going to be continued in the system. I kind of became a little angry, anyway, Mert said that he would go back and talk to Tom Horne. Some time in October, Tom came down. He and I went over this entire project that I had worked on. I had had a reputation in his mind of being impertinent, because I questioned. Why was so much emphasis being put on things that were not fixable, without doing anything about saving things that we already had? So anyway, we spent three days in the field, just Tom and I. When I came back, I checked in at the Refuge and he gave me a ride to the house. We stopped at the stop sign up on Route 9, and I said, "Well, I guess I've got to know, what the decision is?" And he said, "Well Clay, you've exhibited the natural curiosity and have shown the ability to do everything that a Refuge Manager needs to do." And I had admitted to him that I was not proud of the product. But they had said "first draft". Which is a different interpretation of the first draft being a perfect document, versus one that wasn't. So as a result, I did not get terminated, I staid at Brigantine a couple more years. There were quite a few interesting things. We had the big March storm that breeched the dikes and caused havoc

up at the Holgate unit which we had just acquired from the National Audubon Society. It was in the summer of 1963 that we came back from vacation and the maintenance people talked to me about my leaving. Unbeknownst to me I had been, or was going to be reassigned as a Wildlife Biologist down at Bombay Hook. I went down and we got a house, and I was transferred down there.

It was kind of interesting, because one night I was in a hotel outside of Dover, Delaware during the Bay of Pigs. The military scrambled their aircraft and did all sorts of wild things that made it rather interesting. We found a house. The rent went up to \$75.00. But it was a nice house. It was close to the Refuge. Gordon Nightingale was the Manager there. And in my view, he was the ultimate Refuge Manager, in that Whit could use the Manual to find the reasons never to anything, and Gordon could take the Manual and find a reason to do anything and often got into a box. But there were a couple of interesting incidents; back at Brigantine the National Audubon Society held it's first meeting outside of New York City in Atlantic City. We put up a circus tent, and they had part of the meetings out there. As an example, there was a woman attending that conference and we were told that we had to get her to get in touch with her sister. We did that, and it turned out that her son had been murdered in New Orleans. We took her to the airport and did all of these sorts of things. A short time later, I received a letter from her with a check made out to Tom Horne for \$5.00. Apparently, he had received a similar one with my name on it. So he wrote me that Fish and Wildlife Service people didn't accept money. I returned the check, which I couldn't use anyway, and suggested that she buy a Duck Stamp with it. That was the way things were. But I've got to put in here that back then, doing a Refuge budget was; half slips of paper came down by object class with a certain amount of money listed in them. And Whit took that and in pencil, on the lower half of the half a page, said 'with this money I will do this, this or this'. He did that for maybe six object classes, put it in an envelope, mailed it back to Mert Radway who took them from all of the Regions, combined them and said, 'in these object classes, we'll do these things'. Then, Mert would send them directly to J. Clark Salyer. They didn't go to the Regional Director. That was how the budget was done. A Refuge Clerk, all of them except one in our Region, were male. And only fifty percent of their duties were administrative. They were responsible for mowing the lawns and taking school groups and whatever needed to be done. But you didn't spent hours and hours doing administrative stuff. We had a triple entry accounting system, which told the Manager, to the penny, exactly where his budget was at all times. If he did it right and plugged in all of his salaries and that sort of thing. Of course, it wasn't "high finance". My starting wage was \$4,345.00 a year as a GS-5, which gave me \$123.00 every two weeks, which I thought I was in seventh heaven; making that with a college education and a career job. This was until I read in *Life Magazine* of a Puerto Rican woman in New York City who was struggling on \$126.00 every two weeks in Welfare!

Another interesting thing at Brigantine was I entertained the Emperor of Japan's cousin who was an imminent Ornithologist in Japan at the time. He had written a Field

Guide. He was touring the United States and I, with an interpreter took him birding out around the Refuge. He was there part of two different days. That was really a launching into my lifelong; I was always interested in birds, but birding being a major part of public use on the Refuge that if I was going to be successful, I had to help. So I became, and still am a birder.

MS. CORBETT: Was Brigantine a waterfowl Refuge?

MR. HARDY: Brigantine was a waterfowl Refuge. And this is an amazing thing; there were two impoundments out on Brigantine. One was six hundred acres; the other was nine hundred acres. And Henry Whitley had built these. Henry Whitley as I told you, was a CCC Clerk. He totally outfitted the Fish and Wildlife Service in Region 5 and other places with surplus military equipment. We had draglines and we had turner pulls. We had all of these sorts of things. But there was always a schism between engineering and Refuge folks. I don't know if it still exists.

MR. CORBETT: I think it still exists!

MR. HARDY: Henry went out at a slack tide. Well, first he told the crew and they went out and put a whole row of poles in the salt marsh. Then, we had a flood tide, at high tide, they went out and they marked the bottom of all of those poles so they had a level. Then they measured up the height of the dike and from that, and using a carpenter's level was how the grades on that dike were determined. I think it was about six miles to drive around them.

MS. CORBETT: Yeah, a six hundred acre impoundment is a big one!

MR. HARDY: Whit was not Tom Horne's favorite person, but anyway. I went to Bombay Hook. I went down there as a Wildlife Biologist. Gordon Nightingale was the Manager and Dick Rigby was the Assistant at that time. He went west and Dale Cogasall became the Assistant. I was there for three years. When Dale moved on, I went from being Wildlife Biologist to being Assistant Manager. I got an in-site promotion, which was unheard of in those days. We did a lot of stuff at Bombay Hook. That was the big building of the geese in those days. And we had opened up a hunting program, which was sort of interesting in that everything that we sent in was rejected. We wanted a controlled hunt. We wanted to provide the blinds and this sort of stuff. They kept complaining. So finally, Gordon wrote a letter and said that from our perspective this was the only program that can work and be a pride to the Fish and Wildlife Service. "If you don't like it, please send us an alternative which we will implement to the best of our ability." They said for us to go ahead. I was also told, later on, that that decision got Gordon Nightingale a promotion because apparently up until that time they thought he was a little bit too political and did what was wanted, rather than what needed to be done. This couldn't have been further from the truth.

MS. CORBETT: This showed them that he would make decisions.

MR. HARDY: Oh yes! It was interesting with Gordon. He was a very good friend of mine at the time, and the best boss I ever had. He almost drove me out of the Service because we'd go out on a tour of the Refuge. We'd go, and he'd say "stop, that gate rail looks a little off". And he'd make a note and got back around and check it later on to see if there was an eighth of an inch difference between one end and the other. So, one time we had done this, and he came around and said, "You realize Clay, that you do everything so well that I've got to find something?" I think he got this from Mert Radway who was the Refuge Assistant Supervisor who did the inspections. And he'd come to Brigantine, when I was there, and he would examine the trucks. He'd find a dirty rag under the seat. He'd write it up and go on. I've seen him at Bombay Hook, with Gordon there, go and finally take off a battery cable and say that there was corrosion under the bottom of the battery. He went until he found something.

MS. CORBETT: He had to find something!

MR. HARDY: If you put a dirty rag under the seat, that's what he found! At Bombay Hook I got sent out along with Dale, and we attended the first Refuge Manager's Academy in Arden Hills. I think that was in 1965. No, it was 1964. Because in 1965, I was sent on a banding assignment to Newfoundland. It was a three-month long banding assignment, and that was quite an experience, with all of that effort. We banded 257 ducks and I recommended that the program not be repeated because the results weren't...

MS. CORBETT: Well, for three months and only 250 ducks...

MR. HARDY: But they sent me back for a second year. In this whole thing I could, the first conference I ever went to was at the Bradford Hotel. I think the per diem was \$7.00 a day. And that got you a hotel room and three meals. Things went on at Bombay Hook and I was at my desk one day and Gordon told me that Tom Horne wanted to talk to me. So I picked up the phone, he asked me how I was, and if I was sitting down. I told him that I wasn't, and he said, "Well, you'd better!" I sat down, and he told me, "I just want to tell you that you've just been named the Manager of Montezuma Refuge, in upstate New York". He also added, "You realize that you have no say in the matter?" So I was transferred up to ...

MS. CORBETT: So, you didn't apply for these jobs? They would call you and tell you?

MR. HARDY: No, this is an interesting thing. I figured it up one time. I think I had seventeen job titles in my career with the Fish and Wildlife Service. Except for two jobs

that I was told to apply for, I never applied for the jobs that I was put into. And I never got the jobs that I applied for. I figure I had a relatively successful career.

So, we went up to Montezuma. John Morris had been the Manager there. Jerry Cummings was the Assistant. This was another situation where everyone thought that it was just sort of automatic that Jerry would go in, including me. I don't think that people knew that John was being transferred. We landed there in October and had to instigate a hunting program, which was one of the reasons that I was there. We launched off a pretty successful thing there. I was a GS-9 at the time and was told that when I proved myself, I'd get my GS-11. I think we were home for Christmas when I got a letter from Tom Horne who personally sent me the papers promoting me. Montezuma was a wonderful challenge. I had applied for Outdoor Recreational Planning, or something, in Minneapolis. But this was back in the days when you could be nominated for a position. I had received quite a few of these. We went home on vacation, came back, and I had a thing saying that I had been nominated for Biologist job on Amchitka Island in Alaska. So I just stuck that away in the file because they wanted a Biologist and that, I was not. It got along into October and the phone rang one day, I picked it up and this guy says, "This is so-and-so in Personnel, have you heard from Portland?" I was thinking Portland, Maine. I told him no. He told me that I had been selected for that Alaska job, and that he had to let them know whether you'll take it or not. I told him that I had to go and check with my wife because she was totally unaware that I was even nominated for it because I didn't think I had any chance. I went over to the house and she was on the phone. Someone wanted her to get into Girl Scouting. I went through the door and motioned that it was urgent. She told the person on the phone that she would have to call them back. She hung up the phone and said, "Where to?" I told her, "How about Alaska?" She said, "You're kidding!?"

MS. CORBETT: In the sixties!

MR. HARDY: Right. Well, this was 1970. She was all for it. So that started a close to the career there at Montezuma. We came home and got ready. We drove out to Washington. I've got to stop here. My voice is getting tired.

MS. CORBETT: Well, this is a good place to stop. Then we can catch you at another time and talk about Amchitka, and Alaska.

MR. HARDY: This is going to trigger more stuff. I think I started at home just typing up one. Between these two....

MS. CORBETT: We can get this transcribed and sent that to you. That might help.

MR. HARDY: I know that there are a lot of other things that will come to mind that are worthy of note.

